DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 075 754 CG 008 006

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TITLE The School Counselor as Collaborative-Consultant.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Academic Performance; Consultants; Counseling Programs; Counseling Services; Counselor Functions; Counselor Role; *Counselors; *Guidance Services; Junior High Schools; Junior High School Students; *Negro Students; Program Descriptions; Pupil Personnel Services; *Secondary School Counselors; *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

This article describes how a counselor and three teachers collaborated to capture the interest and improve the academic performance of 25 ninth grade Black students in an inner city "ghetto" junior high school. An immediate aim of the program was expansion of existant school guidance services by substituting classroom for counseling office as therapeutic milieu. After six months, the students assumed active leadership of their classes, set their own academic and counseling goals and developed a contract with the administration for earning graduation. The positive results of this study support the current movement within the guidance profession toward greater counselor involvement in the total educational process. The author feels that the generalizability of the Collaborative-Consultant role to a non-insular school setting and to working practitioners may have practical implications for school counselors and may suggest a possible avenue for expansion of guidance services within the school. References are included. (Author/SES)

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THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR AS COLLABORATIVE-CONSULTANT

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how a counselor and three teachers collaborated to capture the interest and improve the academic performance of 25 ninth grade Black students in an inner city "ghetto" junior high school. An immediate aim of the program was expansion of existant school guidance services by substituting classroom for counseling office as therapeutic milieu. After six months, the students assumed active leadership of their classes, set their own academic and counseling goals, and developed a contract with the administration for earning graduation.

Renewed emphasis on accountability and rapid developments in educational research indicate that school counselors need to expand their services, and become actively and visibly involved in the educational life-space of students and teachers. Economic pressures and recent reports of counselor participation in educational teams clearly demonstrate that school counselors cannot be complacent about guidance practice, nor remain insulated from the ongoing realities of the "total" school.

The purpose of this study was to replicate and enlarge an innovative program for counselor-teacher collaboration with adolescents in the secondary school classroom. The aim of the program was therapeutic modification of the learning environment for potentially "alienated" adolescents. This model was designed to generalize the academic and therapeutic gains of earlier "situationally specific" research. (Maslon, 1972). Additional school personnel were included in the collaboration process, and the program was implemented in a "natural" setting.

Counselor participation consisted of in-class collaboration with three teachers individually for eight months, and "consultation" outside of class concurrently. The role of the counselor was that of Collaborative-Consultant. (Lee & Pallone, 1966). The program consisted of a counselor and "a team" of teachers working as co-facilitators of task-oriented groups (Thelen, 1963). Group members were 25 adolescent students in ongoing classroom situations. Task focus was dual: acquisition of academic skills,

and achievement of "personal competence" (Sprinthall, 1971) and "coping strategies" for the developmental tasks of vocational and educational choice (Gazda, 1971).

Classroom counseling experiments have been discussed in the literature, and several limitations were considered in the design of this study; "insularity" of program precluding evaluation of technique (Maslon, 1968, 1972); "team" encapsulation within the school (Ryan, 1967, 1969); and apparent necessity for a "cooperating" suburban school (Frederickson, Bingman & Benson, 1972; Mosher & Sprinthall, 1971) or a "special" laboratory school (Goldman, 1971, 1972; Peterson, 1971).

The Collaborative-Consultant model was designed for application in a non-sheltered secondary school setting. Co-facilitation methods could easily be communicated to "naive" school personnel. Counseling goals and procedures were specified prior to implementation to ensure administrative approval for one year. The study was conducted for possible replication by other school staff members; counselors and faculty.

Team participants consisted of counselor, five teachers, and an administrator on a peripheral basis. The students were part of the counselor's regular caseload and the faculty's teaching roster. The counselor was actively involved in three classrooms; Social Studies, English, and Math. The student population was Black and the adult team was integrated.

Procedures

To test the efficacy of the model in a "ghetto school environ-

ment," the guidance counselor in an inner city junior high school of 2,200 Black students was asked to implement the collaborative-consultant process with a class of 25 ninth grade adolescents. Selection criteria were "need" and "availability" as judged by teacher referrals on the first day of the school term. Counseling "problems" in this class ranged from truancy, delinquency, and in-class disruptiveness, to learning difficulties, underachievement, socio-personal adjustment, and educational/vocational placement.

Available IOWA scores showed that none of the students had scored above .02% locally or nationally in three basic skill areas: English/Reading, Social Studies, Math. Cumulative records confirmed the adolescents' performance at 2nd - 4th grade level in these academic areas. This class was not unique. A similar "low achievement" trend was true for over 85% of the total school population. The school had a high rate of truancy and absenteeism, and many students terminated formal education after the ninth grade.

The collaborative-consultant program was designed to improve academic performance by altering aspects of classroom procedures and environment. The proposed expansion of traditional school guidance services entailed substitution of ongoing classroom for insulated counseling office one 45 minute period per day.

Before accepting "cases", the counselor conferred with each teacher about individual(s) and the entire group. The counselor also "observed" the adolescents "in action" in all their classes,

noting teacher-student interactions, and reactions to the counselor's presence in the classroom. After a two-day observation period, three faculty members were asked to participate in the collaborative team.

Co-Facilitation Process

Counselor participation consisted of in-class collaboration with each teacher individually for eight months. Frequency, degree, and style of counselor activity in a given class were governed by realistic factors: possible inequitable and inefficient use of counselor time in a "difficult" school (caseload over 700), and the schedule of collaborating teachers.

Counseling and teaching methods were agreed on prior to the project. Differences in teaching styles, and in each adult's tolerance for certain adolescent behaviors entailed: differential styles of "co-facilitation," adaptation of group work methods to "task" and teacher preference, and setting definite goals for each classroom situation. Counseling techniques were chosen to optimize the potentially complementary aspects of counselor-teacher teamwork (Maslon, 1968; Tiedeman, 1966), and simultaneously achieve both therapeutic and educational objectives.

In all three classes, the counselor's co-facilitation methods approximated those of a member-participant "group centered leader." This approach:

> places values on two goals: the ultimate development of the group's independence and self responsibility, and the release of the group's potential capacities.
>
> (Gordon, 1951, p. 337)

Counseling aims were the following: creating and maintaining a non-threatening classroom atmosphere, facilitating free communication between students and teachers, providing opportunities for individual participation, and "attending" and conveying acceptance to all group members.

Specific counseling and teaching objectives were: educational motivation, and personal/social/vocational/educational development in Social Studies; educational motivation, and basic skill acquisition in English and Math. Since co-facilitation processes varied in each class, the counselor's "personal style" was adapted to the reality of classroom situations. Ambiguity or "professionalese" in language or behavior would have alienated faculty and adolescents, so counselor "transparency" or openness (versus the traditional Rogerian "blank screen" or "opacity") was a necessary aspect of the process. The counselor's intellectual beliefs, professional biases, personal values, etc. were expressed honestly and freely, and the counselor's actions were straightforward and direct.

In-Class Counseling Methods

The counselor participated in the students' Social Studies class three periods per week, and in English and Math class once a week each. The methods used by the counselor in each class were the following specific techniques: ego counseling (Hummel, 1963); group work (Bion, 1961; Gordon, 1951 & 1955; Thelen, 1963); therapeutic tutoring (Massimo, 1962 & 1965); some team teaching, and individual counseling. The methods were adopted to definite

phases of the process and to the curriculum dimensions used as task focus during a given phase.

In all classes, one of the counselor's primary functions was "modeling" behavior for the students; taking notes on content, participating in classroom activities, asking questions, etc. The counselor's "teaching" consisted of tutoring individuals and small groups. Counseling, at an immediate reality level, took place simultaneously. When "counseling issues" were part of the curriculum content, the counselor and teacher(s) "co-led" group discussions.

Counsultation Procedures

Outside of class, the counselor served as "consultant" to the teachers, simultaneously with collaboration. The counselor conferred regularly with each teacher individually throughout the project, before or after class meetings. "Consultation" consisted of curriculum planning for the students (jointly) and open discussions of psychological and counseling issues.

The counselor's consulting procedures with each teacher were the following. On a bi-weekly basis, the counselor and English teacher experimented with available "affective education" materials, and adpated curriculum to academic skill level of the class and individual students. After in-class implementation. the counselor and teacher discussed results, and modified content accordingly. The counselor and English teacher also con-

ferred informally (weekly) about individual and group guidance techniques for a "sub-group" of six male delinquent gang members.

Weekly, the counselor and the Math teacher conferred informally about curriculum content. The counselor suggested use of the students' (and the teachers') immediate in-school experiences and concerns as an "affective" or subjective dimension for motivational purposes. Subsequently, faculty bowling averages, money, etc. were included in the Math curriculum. During these conferences, the counselor also consulted with the Math teacher about "psychological" concerns relevant to group and individuals.

The counselor consulted with the Social Studies teacher three times a week, formally, and informally. The counselor and teacher deliberately planned the curriculum for the group and individuals outside of class, and also accepted spontaneous suggestions from the students during class meetings. All curriculum materials in Social Studies were selected for three objectives: task focus for the group, reinforcement of English and Math classes, and conduciveness to open discussions of topics of adolescent interest. After each class meeting, the counselor and Social Studies teacher also discussed classroom "co-counseling" methods; "group process" issues (cohesiveness, movement, cliques, reactions to leaders, dependence, independence, etc.), and individual students.

While specific "consulting" procedures and content differed in each situation, open communication between all three teachers and the counselor was maintained throughout the project. The counselor kept anecdotal records (behavioral notes) on each

classroom contact with the students, and shared these records with all collaborating faculty.

Treatment Progression

The treatment progression (using Social Studies as an example) is outlined as follows: the counselor used group work methods to establish class cohesiveness and to encourage student participation in academic tasks; on a large group basis through a class project (duplicating, collating, and then reading an abridged version of Claude Brown's Manchild in the Promised Land), and later transition to small group curriculum dimensions (short stories, spelling, cross-word puzzles, etc.). Focus on individual learning and counseling took place through reading, writing, and open class discussions of specific issues; delinquency, politics, families, etc. Curriculum materials were selected for subjective appeal. To stimulate student expression of opinion, the counselor and teacher participated in discussions, and shared their own different ideas with the adolescents.

Specific materials differed in English and Math, but counseling methods and treatment progression were the same: large group projects, and later small group curriculum dimensions and individual learning assignments. In all three classes counselor-teacher-student communication was on an immediate reality level. The counselor's suggestions, comments, etc., were based on observable behavior. Feelings were relevant to the ongoing situations, but the counselor focussed on definite academic tasks as "strategies" for handling emotional issues and interpersonal concerns. Even

in spontaneous classroom discussions, feelings and personal experiences were expressed within structured situations, and were directed to accomplishment of concrete objectives. The counselor and the teachers emphasized students' "helping" each other, to reduce their dependence on adults.

Student Assumption of Leadership

After six months, the students assumed active leadership of their classes, and set their own academic and counseling goals. At their request, Social Studies class discussions and activities focussed exclusively on the adolescents' future educational and vocational plans: discussion of high school subjects and curriculum choice; planning and obtaining summer jobs and part-time employment for the next year; "role playing" job interviews and high school situations in class, etc. English and Math classes followed a similar pattern; the students accelerated the pace of basic skill acquisition.

The adolescents added three school adults to the collaborative team; two minor subject teachers and an administrator. They asked the counselor to "consult" with adjunct faculty as well as collaborating teachers about their educational and vocational plans. The students developed a "Contract" with the administrator: the goal was "earning graduation," entailing perfect attendance and "A" in conduct and academic performance each period of the school day for the remaining two months of the year.

In summary, during the transition-termination phase of the

project, the adolescents extended the collaborative-consultant process to three additional "significant" school personnel, assumed leadership of their group, and implemented a system of self-imposed sanctions on the entire class to achieve their individual goals.

Results

Although formal evaluation of the project was not possible, the following results were obtained:

All 25 members of the class progressed from 2nd - 4th grade level in basic skill subjects (English/Reading, Social Studies, Math) to ninth grade performance as judged by specific academic criteria, and improved grade point average.

All members of the class participated in school "graduation" exercises and continued formal education.

Follow-up data on individuals gathered two years after the study through conferences with High School counselors and teachers, and through peer group reports showed High School attendance for 20 students, and "satisfactory adjustment." Fifteen students were employed part-time, after school.[1]

Administrative action supported the positive findings. The Collaborative-Consultant model was built into the school program the following year. The team was expanded to include additional

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[1] Five members of this adolescent population had moved from the city, so follow-up data were unavailable.

school staff members: a "neophyte" counselor, five eighth grade teachers, and two outside pupil personnel resources on a part-time consulting basis; a school psychologist and a juvenile probation worker. The counselor involved in the original study was assigned to work with the five inexperienced faculty at the eighth grade level. The ninth grade faculty participants in the study were assigned as a team to the inexperienced counselor. Selection criteria for the students in these eighth and ninth grade classes were the following: the school administration waived the city-wide practice of "automatic promotion" for 50 adolescents. Severe academic failures, "behavior problems," and chronic absentees (defined by absence over a specific number of school days) were retained. Counseling and teaching objectives for both classes and for individual students were explicit: "earning promotion." Objective evaluation measures (attendance, GPA, IOWA scores) were included in the expanded program.

Conclusion

The positive results of this study support the current movement within the guidance profession toward greater counselor involvement in the total educational process. The generalizability of the Collaborative-Consultant role to a non-insular school setting, and to working practitioners (counselors and teachers) may have practical implications for school counselors. While there is no "one" solution to the challenge of counselor "accountability," and the results of this study were not subject to rigorous evaluation, the positive outcome

suggests a possible avenue for expansion of guidance services with the school.

The Collaborative-Consultant model is an example of active counselor-teacher-student participation in an ongoing, non-sheltered educational environment. Since the outcome of the study was positive, in terms of improved academic performance and achievement of counseling goals, it is suggested that further attempts to implement methods of counselor-teacher collaboration may be an effective way of expanding school counseling practice in "natural" settings with potentially "alienated" adolescents.

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